ASSETS

Context

Health and social research has defined various protective factors. These factors, if present in a young person's life, are thought to help protect them from involvement in problem or risk behaviors. Protective factors include both internal qualities intrinsic to an individual and external qualities of the social environment.

Research by the Search Institute in Minneapolis, Minnesota has identified 40 such factors called developmental assets believed to be important in helping young people grow up to be healthy, caring and responsible citizens. The assets are clustered under eight broad headings: Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, Constructive Use of Time, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social Competencies, and Positive Identities.

Sixteen questions were included in the survey instrument to gauge the levels of some protective factors or assets. These questions were used to determine correlations among assets that students had or lacked as well as the level of risk-taking behavior they reported being involved in.

Highlights

➢ Students expressed generally high levels of assets in social support, expectations, positive values, social competencies and grades.

➢ The protective power of assets was demonstrated by the negative correlations such assets had with alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use, violence, sexual activity and risky use of vehicles.

➢ In general positive values and grades demonstrated the most protective power.

➢ There was a significant decrease between 1997 and 1999 among those who said that their teachers really care about them and give them support and among those that said that it is important to help other people.

➢ In general, female students possessed more assets than male students.

Social Support

Students in the YRBS were asked three questions about their support from parents, teachers and other adults (see Figure 1). Four out of five students said that their family loves them and gives them support when they need it[1]. Students were also asked how many adults, other than their parents, they would feel comfortable going to for help. Sixty-nine percent said there were two or more adults they could turn to for help, 16 percent said that there was at least one adult, and only 14 percent said that there were no adults they would feel comfortable going to. Nearly half of the students also felt that their teachers really care about them and give them lots of encouragement.

Figure 1. Social Support.
Percentage of all students by responses to questions about social support.

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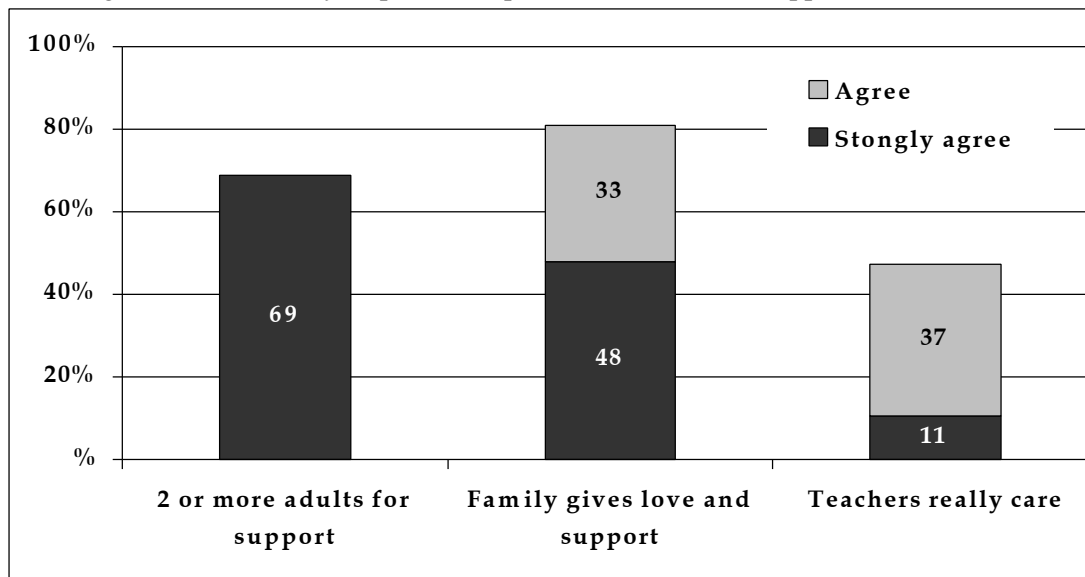
[1] For this series of questions, students who either "strongly" or "somewhat" agreed with the statement were combined.

Expectations

Students were asked three questions about expectations for their behavior. Over three-quarters of students reported that their families had clear rules and standards for their behavior (see Figure 2). Over half of the students said that their parents ask where they were going and who they would be with "all the time" and an additional quarter reported that this occurred "most of the time". A recent study of parents found that nine out of ten parents said they usually or always knew where their child was and who they were with (Bogenschneider, et al. 1996). About the same percentage said that their school has clear rules and consequences for behavior.

Figure 2. Expectations.
Percentage of all students by responses to questions about expectations.
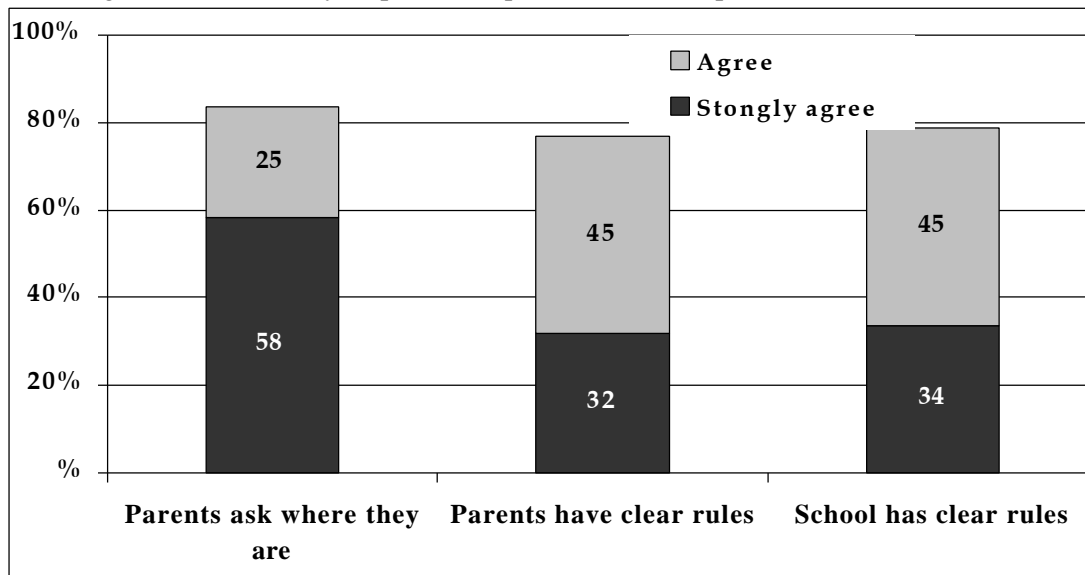
Positive Values

Students were asked a series of five questions about their positive values regarding themselves, others, their work, and their future[2]. Three-quarters of all students said that they try hard to do their best at school (see Figure 3). Six out of ten said that it was important to them to help other people. Almost nine out of ten said that they cared about other people's feelings. Over half said that it was important for them not to use alcohol or other drugs. Forty-four percent said that it was important for them to delay having sexual intercourse until they were married, engaged or an adult in a long-term committed relationship.

Figure 3. Positive Values.
Percentage of all students who "strongly agreed" or "agreed" to questions about values by gender and percentage of all students who said that it is important to them to delay sexual intercourse until marriage, engagement or until they are an adult in a long-term committed relationship.


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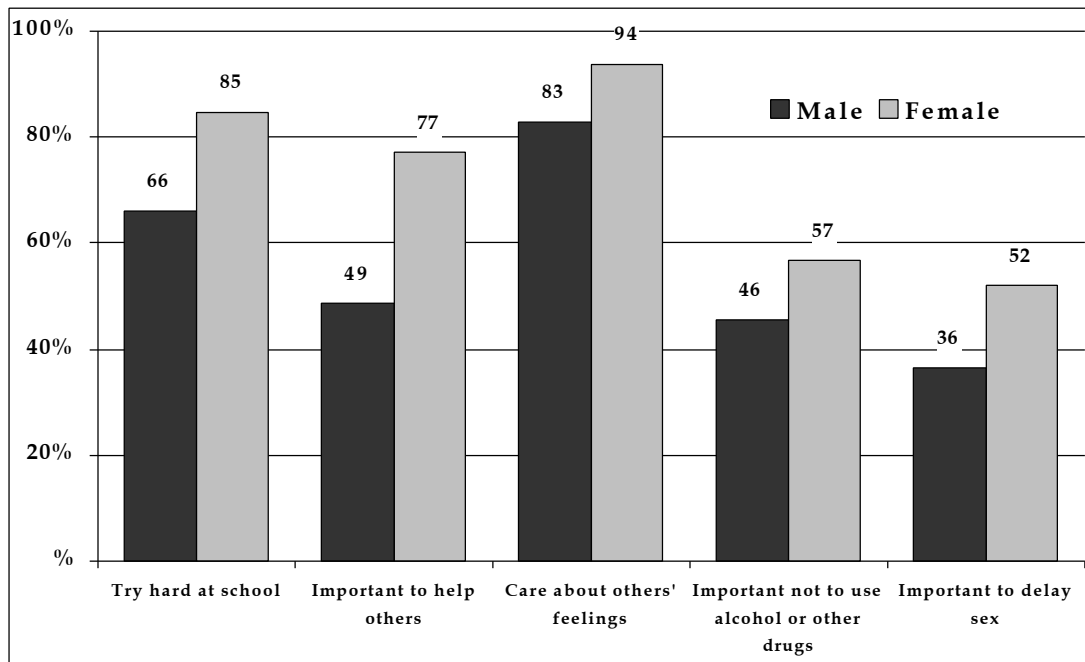
[2] Each question except for the one about the importance of helping others was asked as a five point Likert scale question with possible responses including: strongly agree, somewhat agree, not sure, somewhat disagree, and strongly disagree. Reported statistics are the combined responses to "strongly" and "somewhat" agree. The importance of helping others used a four-point scale ranging from "not important" to "extremely important". Reported statistics are the combined responses to "quite" and "extremely" important.

Social Competencies

Students were asked four questions about their social competencies (see Figure 4). Ninety percent said that they stand up for their beliefs. Seventy-eight percent thought that they were good at making decisions and following through on them. Eighty-one percent said that they were good at making friends. Almost the same percentage said that they could resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.

Figure 4. Social Competencies.
Percentage of all students by responses to questions about social competencies.
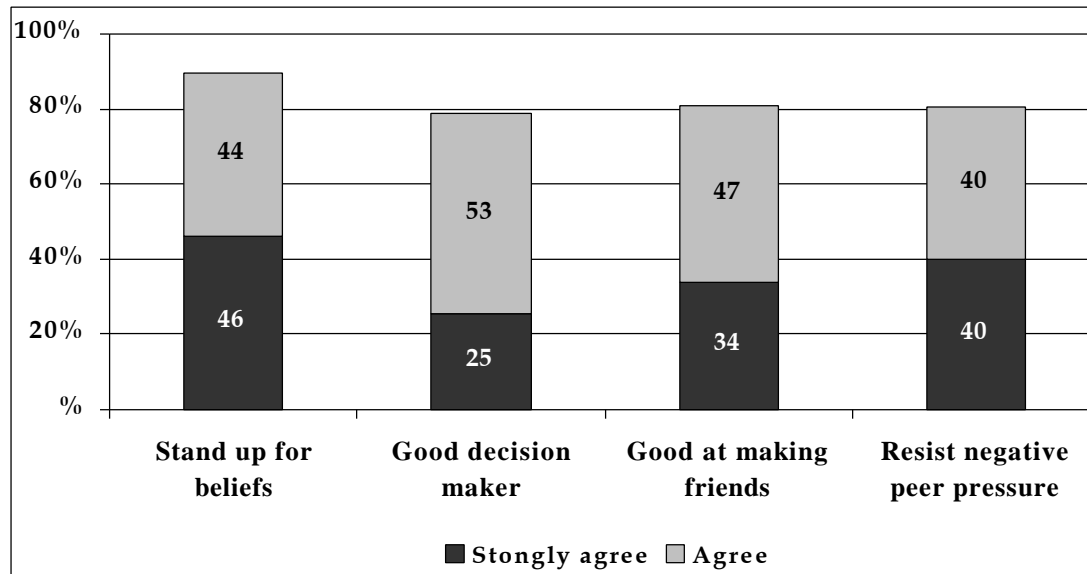
Grades

Students were asked what best describes their grades. Forty-nine percent of students described their grades as mostly A's or about half A's and B's. These two responses were considered to represent protective factors of school success.

Trends

SOCIAL SUPPORT. There were no significant differences between 1997 and 1999[3] among those students who said that their families give them love and support and among those who had two or more adults from whom they could seek help. There was a significant decrease, however, among those who reported that their teachers really care about them and give them help. Fifty-two percent agreed with this statement in 1997 compared to 47 percent in 1999.

EXPECTATIONS.[4] There were no significant differences between 1997 and 1999 among those students who reported that their parents ask where they are going and with whom they will be or among those who reported that their parents have clear rules and standards for their behavior.

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[3] No asset questions were asked in 1993.

[4] Students were not asked about school rules in 1997.

POSITIVE VALUES.[5] There were no significant differences between 1997 and 1999 among those students who reported that they try hard at school or who report that they care about other people's feelings. Students in 1999 were significantly less likely to report that it is important to them to help other people with the percentage dropping from 67 percent to 62 percent.

SOCIAL COMPETENCIES.[6] There were no significant differences between 1997 and 1999 among those students who reported that they stand up for their beliefs or who reported that they are good at making decisions and following through on them.

GRADES. No trend analysis is possible as this question was not asked before 1999.

Comparisons by Demographic Groups

Gender

SOCIAL SUPPORT. There were no differences between male and female students in feeling that their families loved and supported them or who thought that their teachers cared about and encouraged them. However, male students were nearly twice as likely as female students to say that they had no adults from which they would feel comfortable seeking help (18 percent compared to 10 percent).

EXPECTATIONS. Female students are significantly more likely than male students to report that their parents ask where they are going and who they will be with "all the time" or "most of the time" (87 percent compared to 80 percent). Female students were also slightly more likely to say that their parents had clear rules and standards for their behavior (78 percent compared to 76 percent). Male students, on the other hand, were more likely to say that their school has clear rules and consequences for their behavior (80 percent compared to 77 percent).

POSITIVE VALUES. Female students were significantly more likely to say that they tried hard to do their best at school (85 percent compared to 66 percent), that it was important to help others (77 percent compared to 49 percent), and that they cared about people's feelings (94 percent compared to 83 percent). Female students were more likely to say that it was important to them to delay having sexual intercourse until marriage, engagement or an adult in a long-term committed relationship (52 percent compared to 36 percent). They were also more likely to say that it was important for them to not use alcohol or other drugs than male students were (57 percent compared to 46 percent).

SOCIAL COMPETENCIES. Female students were more likely than male students to report that they could resist negative peer pressure (82 percent compared to 79 percent). Female students were also slightly more likely to say that they are good at making friends, however this differences was not statistically significant. There was no difference between male and female students in the percentage who said they that they were good at making and following through on decisions or between those who said that they stood up for what they believed in.

GRADES. Female students were significantly more likely to describe their grades as mostly A's or about half A's and B's than male students were (58 percent compared to 40 percent).

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[5] Students were not asked about abstaining from sex or the importance of not using drugs in 1997.

[6] Students were not asked about their ability to make friends or their ability to resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situation in 1997.

Grade

SOCIAL SUPPORT. There are no significant differences between the grades in the percentage who feel their families love and support them, the number of other adults they feel they can turn to, or in the percentage that feel their teachers really care for and encourage them.

EXPECTATIONS. As grade level increases, there is a tendency for fewer students to report that their parents ask where they are going and who they will be with. Likewise there is a slight decrease among those who say that their school has clear rules and consequences for their behavior. There is no difference, however, in the percentage who say their parents have clear rules and standards.

POSITIVE VALUES. There is a slight decrease in the percentage of students who said they try hard to do their best at school between ninth and twelfth grades. At the same time, there is a steady increase in the percentage that say that it is important to help other people with the exception of eleventh grade students who reported the lowest level of this value. There is no significant difference in the percentage of students in each grade who said that they cared about people's feelings. There is a significant decrease by grade among those who say that it was important to delay having sexual intercourse until married, engaged or are an adult in a long-term committed relationship. Twenty six percent of ninth grade students say this compared to seventeen percent of twelfth grade students. The same trend is true for those who say that it is important to not use alcohol or other drugs. Sixty percent of ninth grade students report this compared to 45 percent of eleventh and 46 percent of twelfth grade students. This difference is statistically significant.

SOCIAL COMPETENCIES. There is no significant difference between the grades in those who reported that they stood up for their beliefs, felt they were good at making and following through on decisions or who felt that they were good at making friends. There is a steady increase in the percentage who say that they can resist negative peer pressure with the exception of eleventh grade students who reported the lowest level of this value.

GRADES. There was no significant difference between the ninth through twelfth grade students in how they described their grades.

Asset Indices

Four indices were constructed to provide an overview of protective assets. Indices were created to measure the overall number of protective assets in each of the four areas described above: social support, expectations, positive values and social competencies[7].

Social Support

The social support index aggregated three variables including: having a loving and supportive family, having caring and supportive teachers, and having two or more adults other than parents that the student can turn to for help.

The asset index ranged from zero to three. Students averaged 2.1 assets. Three percent reported zero assets. Eighteen percent reported one asset, 41 percent reported two assets, and 37 percent reported three assets. Female students reported slightly more assets than male students. There were no significant differences among the grade levels.

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[7] Students were considered to have each asset if they either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with the statement with the exception of having adults other than their parents that they could turn to. For that question, students were considered to have the asset if they indicated tow or more. Indices were then created by adding together the number of assets for each student.

Expectations

The expectations index aggregated three assets including: having clearly defined rules and expectations from parents, having a school with clearly defined rules, and having parents who "always" or "usually" ask where the student is going and who they will be with.

The asset index ranged from zero to three. Students averaged 2.4 assets. Five percent reported zero assets. Eleven percent reported one asset, 28 percent reported two assets, and 56 percent reported three assets. There was no significant difference between the genders or among the grades.

Positive Values

The positive values index aggregated five variables: trying hard at school, the importance of helping others, caring about other people's feelings, the importance of not using alcohol or other drugs, and the importance of delaying sexual activity until marriage, engagement or they are an adult in a long-term committed relationship.

The beliefs index ranged from zero to five. Students averaged 2.9 positive beliefs. Less than one percent reported zero positive values. Eleven percent reported one value, 24 percent reported two, 29 percent reported three, 30 percent reported four and six percent reported all five. Female students reported slightly more positive beliefs than male students. Positive values declined slightly as grade increased.

Social Competencies

The social competencies index combined four abilities: having the ability to make decisions and follow through on them, standing up for one's beliefs, being good at making friends, and resisting negative peer pressure.

The social competencies index ranged from zero to four. Students averaged 3.3 competencies. Two percent reported zero competency, five percent reported one, 12 percent reported two, 24 percent reported three, and 56 percent reported all four. Female students reported slightly more competencies than male students. There were no significant differences among the grade levels.

Grades

Though only one question, self-reported grades was used as an independent measure. As such, analysis of this variable is already provided above.

Total Assets

The total asset index was computed by adding the scores of each of the 16 assets together. The total assets index ranged from one to 16. Students averaged 11.1 assets overall. Four percent reported five or fewer assets. Thirty-four percent reported six to ten assets and 62 percent reported more than 10 assets. On average, female students reported nearly one more total asset than male students. There were no significant differences among the grade levels.

The Protective Power of Assets

When assets are present, students tend to report less involvement in certain risk behaviors. Indices of risky behaviors were created[8] and the correlation between asset and risk factor indices were investigated.

A correlation analysis[9] examines the tendency for different factors to occur together. A high positive correlation between two sets of factors means that there is a high probability that if students report one set of factors they will also report the second set as well. A high negative correlation means that if a student reports a set of factors, they are less likely to report the second set of factors. The size of the correlation (from -1 to 1) indicates the size of the relationship. That is, a correlation of 1 would mean that every time the first factor is present, the second factor will be present as well. A correlation of zero means that the second factor is no more likely to be present with the first factor than it would be merely by chance.

Of the 72 pairs created by correlating asset indices with risk factor indices, 11 had strong negative correlations of –0.35 or lower and 8 had moderate negative correlations between -0.25 and –0.34 (see Table 1). An additional 27 had weak correlations between –0.15 and –0.24 There was a significant negative correlation of –0.54 between total assets and total risk factors. There were also moderate to strong negative correlations between each asset indices and total risk factors (these range from -0.25 to -0.54). In other words, as assets increased, involvement in many risky behaviors decreased significantly. The strongest negative correlations existed between assets and alcohol use, drug use, tobacco use, and vehicle safety. The weakest correlations were found with the exercise, nutrition, and dieting indices. When individual risk factor indices were examined, only positive values and grades demonstrated significant strong negative correlations.

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[8] The methodology used to create risk factor indices is described on page 1 of the section, "Risk Factor Indexes".

[9] Using a Spearman's rho correlation.

Table 1 - Risk Factor Indices and Asset Indices Correlations

	Alcohol	Nutrition	Dieting	Drugs	Exercise	Sexual Activity	Suicide	Tobacco	Vehicle Safety	Violence	Weapons	Total Risk
Social Support	-			-		-		-	-	-		- -
Expectations	-			-		-		-	-	-		- -
Positive Values	- - -			- - -		-	-	- - -	- - -	-	-	- - -
Social Competencies	-			-			-	-	-			- -
Grades	-			- -		-		- -	- -	-	-	- - -
Total Assets	- - -			- - -		- -	-	- - -	- - -	- -	-	- - -

- signifies correlations from -0.15 to –0.24
- - signifies correlations from -0.25 to -0.34
- - - signifies correlations equal to or less than -0.35

In sum, this analysis points out the powerful effect that assets can have on reducing risky behaviors. Students with multiple assets are much less likely to engage in both specific risky behaviors and in broader areas of concern such as tobacco use, alcohol use, drug use, sexual behavior, vehicle safety and violence. Given the tremendous results that preventing these risk behaviors would have on the health, education, and development of young people along with greatly reduced health care and social costs, these findings suggest that building assets provides a very sound and powerful basis for moving toward that goal.